

Give spring migrants a helping hand



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A family friend called me recently to ask about robins. She moved to a condo on the Seine River a few years ago. This spring she saw robins moving in waves through her shrubs. Not just one or two — but hundreds within a single morning. Was this unusual?

My answer was yes . . . and no.

Although it happens every year, you must be in the right place at the right time. A forest-lined river can be the right place. A few days each spring is the right time.

Natural habitats along rivers are ideal places for exhausted migrants to rest, eat, and hide from predators. In the early spring, you may notice clouds of tiny insects hovering above the river and trails. These are non-biting midges — not mosquitoes. They are one of the most important foods for insect-eating migrants.

Although the spring migration can be impressive, people

over 50 often say there seems to be fewer birds now than when they were young. They are right.

Based on long-term observations, the Audubon Society reported that populations of 20 common birds in North America declined by an average of 68 per cent between 1967 and 2007. Some species declined by 80 per cent. For every 100 birds I saw in 1967, a child today will only see 20 or 30.

Can we reverse this trend and bring back the birds?

Yes! We can conserve and restore natural habitats. We can reduce insecticide use. We can remove sod in our yards and city parks and replace it with native grasses, wildflowers, herbs, shrubs, and trees that provide food (nectar, fruit, berries, nuts, and seeds) and shelter for birds. And, we can stop weeds from invading natural spaces.

Contrary to popular belief, weeds will not disappear through plant succession if we do nothing. Bird populations will not recover if we do nothing. We need to lend nature a helping hand.

Save Our Seine and Nature Manitoba invite you to discover the beauty and diversity of spring birds with Christian Artuso — one of Manitoba's foremost birders.

Meet at the green space northeast of the Royalwood bridge at 8 a.m. on Sat., May 23 for this two-hour stroll.



Supplied photo

Discover spring migrants, such as this yellow warbler, on Sat., May 23 by joining Christian Artuso on a bird-watching walk, presented by Save Our Seine and Nature Manitoba.

Then, on Sat., May 30, SOS volunteers need your help to tackle some weedy “hot spots” along the river. Bring gardening gloves, water, and insect repellent for this weed-pulling event.

Discover the beauty and diversity of spring migrants on Sat., May 23.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine. Visit www.saveourseine.com for details of these and other 25th anniversary events.